

Rep. Bradley Byrne's Prepared Remarks on the Floor of the House of Representatives

November 13, 2019

Thank you, Madam Speaker. The House of Representatives has been a scene of serious chaos, not only today, but for weeks. Unfortunately for the American people, we have nothing to show for it.

We haven't been working on the US-Mexico Canada free trade agreement that President Trump worked so hard to negotiate. We haven't been working on funding the military, or bipartisan legislation to lower the cost of prescription drugs. No, 100 percent of the energy of this place has been devoted to the impeachment of President Trump!

You know, there has been a lot of noise, a lot of rumors, and a lot of confusion about exactly what has happened and what is going on, where we are and how we got here. There is a reason for that.

You see, Madam Speaker, by House rules, impeachment is under the jurisdiction of the Judiciary Committee. The Judiciary Committee has a great big hearing room just across the street. That's where an impeachment inquiry is supposed to take place.

But we aren't holding hearings there because Speaker Pelosi doesn't want them there! Instead, the impeachment charade has been taking place in a small, restricted room, two floors underground, below this chamber, deep in the bowels of the Capitol. That room is known as the SCIF. The SCIF is a very important room because it's where members of Congress hear about our country's great secrets. You can't bring a cell phone in there. You can't bring a camera in there. And, most importantly, the public can't go in there.

Democrats made a big spectacle about holding their first public hearing today. They act as if they are making some great, virtuous action to bring forth transparency, as if they are operating with the utmost integrity. The truth is that today's hearing is little more than a public showcasing of witnesses they've already interrogated and vetted in that little room to ensure they will say only what the Democrats desire.

You see, Madam Speaker, by conducting impeachment in that little room, Speaker Pelosi and Adam Schiff knew that the American people wouldn't know what was going on, what was being said. But, right outside the SCIF, that tiny room, you will find dozens of cameras and news people. Here they are, you can see, talking to Adam Schiff.

Adam Schiff and his staff have been feeding these reporters bits of information for weeks. For weeks, we have been flooded with reports of so-called "explosive" things that have supposedly been said in this small, secret room.

Madam Speaker, there is a rule in the House that every member of Congress has the right to at least watch a committee hearing. A couple of weeks ago, some of my colleagues and I decided that we wanted to know what was really going on in there. So, we entered the SCIF, that little room, simply to watch. Adam Schiff immediately stopped the proceedings. And, he refused to proceed until we left.

There is another rule of the House that says the records of committees are the property of the House and every member is entitled to review them. There is a reason for this rule. These records don't belong to Adam Schiff! They don't belong to Speaker Pelosi! They don't belong to me! They belong to the American people.

So, again, I went back to the SCIF, back to that little room, and I showed them that House rule and informed them I only wanted to read the transcripts from these secret proceedings. But Chairman Schiff's staff said no. They would not follow the rules of the House, they would not let me read them. They said, you'll get them later, along with everybody else, when we say so.

So, finally, they released the transcripts in a way that fit their agenda. Madam Speaker, I have been reading these transcripts as they come out. And, I have also been reading what the mainstream media has to say about them. Would you believe it, the mainstream media is saying exactly what Adam Schiff wants them to say! Almost none of them are talking about the other side, about President Trump's defense.

So, to make sure the American people have the facts, I felt compelled to come down to the floor tonight and talk about the things that, if you're not reading these thousands of pages of materials, you might have missed.

There have now been about 3,000 pages of testimony released. Despite many differing opinions in those pages, there is universal agreement that Ukraine is one of the most corrupt countries on earth. You see, Madam Speaker, Ukraine, like many former Soviet countries, is controlled by oligarchs. These guys have almost all the wealth, most of the industry, and pretty much all of the political power.

Corruption is so bad in Ukraine that many American business people refuse to do business there, because they don't want to deal with the notorious oligarchs. And, it has been the policy of Republican and Democrat Presidents – for nearly 30 years – that Ukraine must end corruption, must adopt the rule of law, and must take away power from the oligarchs. You have had Ukrainian Presidents come and go but time and time again, things seem to stay the same.

During the 2016 Presidential-election, we know that senior members of the Ukrainian government were very much on Secretary Clinton's side. Don't take my word for it. You can pull this article which was written in the final days of President Obama's presidency yourself.

That's not some right-wing website, that's Politico. It might be a little hard to read but here it says "[Ukrainian] officials are scrambling to make amends with the president-elect after quietly working to boost Clinton."

Thanks to Adam Schiff's star chamber rules, we still have not gotten to hear the President's side of the story. But it should come as a surprise to no one, as some Democrats have pretended, that President Trump did not want to devote his valuable, limited time by doing things like holding an oval office meeting with the President of Ukraine, after facing stuff like this.

Of course, a president not offering a rare oval office meeting is not the same thing as not providing United States support. As most know, Ukraine has been at war with Russia for about five years. Russia illegally invaded Ukraine and still has forces there today. President Obama rightly began to give non-lethal aide to Ukraine to help in that war. But President Obama would not sell weapons to Ukraine, because he was scared that it would upset the Russians.

It actually was, would you believe it, President Trump who began selling real weapons to Ukraine to help them actually bring the fight to the Russians! That decision has had an enormous positive effect on Ukraine. Even those testifying who don't like the President have praised him for that.

But, again, it appears that most of the issues that the Democrats are raising started with a few individuals in the Administration trying to convince President Trump he should forget Ukraine's past, embrace the new President of Ukraine, and put a serious amount of his time into Ukraine. They began, in their own words, working to change President Trump's mind on Ukraine.

For weeks, we have been going back and forth about what these individuals may or may not have been doing. We have a mountain of bureaucratic gossip about what was going on, who was doing what. We have a lot of conflicting testimony, speculation, and hearsay—which is gossip. But the Democrats have provided zero, and I mean no direct evidence, showing President Trump ordered some kind of quid pro quo.

With all this testimony and with all these rumors, it is easy to forget that this all goes back to the whistleblower. Of course, we know that the whistleblower also lacked firsthand knowledge of what he reportedly blew the whistle on. He was, according to the Inspector General, a partisan individual.

The whistleblower made allegations that President Trump made “demands” on President Zelensky on a phone call that occurred in the White House on July 25th. But, very few people in the media have reported that President Zelensky has publicly, clearly, and repeatedly denied any demands were ever made on him. They also have not reported that the Justice Department reviewed this allegation and declined to pursue a criminal investigation.

Nevertheless, President Trump took the extraordinary step of releasing the transcript of this supposedly extraordinary call. You can read the entire transcript online. I hope the American people will do so because you won’t find one demand in there, not one. Read the transcripts!

Madam Speaker, the other issue that has been swirling downstairs in that little room is this hold that was placed on security assistance to Ukraine and apparently some other countries as well. We know that somewhere around July 10th, the Office of Management and Budget placed a hold on certain foreign aid going to Ukraine. That is not a cancelation of the funds. That is a process allowing the funds to be reviewed.

Importantly, Madam Speaker, that hold was placed before the phone call that President Trump had with President Zelensky, the call that the whistleblower raised. But, Madam Speaker, do you want to know something interesting? In the transcript, neither President Trump nor President Zelensky said one word about the hold on that call! You would think that if President Trump were trying to use the aid for extortion, he would have at least mentioned it.

You would have also figured that President Zelensky would have mentioned the issue, given how important this aid was to his country.

The truth is the reason President Zelensky did not mention the funds was because he did not know the funds were on hold and President Trump never told him! Madam Speaker, this would be a very strange quid pro quo—where President Trump did not tell President Zelensky and President Zelensky did not know that the funds were on hold.

In fact, it appears the Ukrainians first found out about the hold when it was reported by the press on August 29th. Never mind that the funds were released 11 or 12 days later, at the latest, unconditionally.

But, let’s talk about that hold. Many of the witnesses have speculated about why OMB placed a hold on the aid, but when pressed, in all those thousands of pages, they’ve all said some version of I don’t know why the aid was placed on hold or I think it was for this reason, but I don’t really know.

Let’s just look at the facts. It seems that most everybody has somehow forgotten that President Trump ran a campaign on a deep skepticism of foreign aid. He asked some tough questions that the American people appreciated – are we getting our fair share? Are the Europeans freeloading off us?

So, we have a new President, a new parliament in Ukraine – is it really that surprising that an Administration run by President Trump would say, let's take another look at this before we send another \$250 million out the door? I think the American people would find that pretty reasonable.

Again, Madam Speaker, we have a lot of bureaucratic gossip here, a lot of speculation, but not one person has testified that they had any direct knowledge that President Trump ordered the aid be held in exchange for some kind of political favor—not one person!

In fact, the only witness who had any form of serious contact with President Trump, Ambassador Sondland, testified that he called President Trump and asked him what was going on with the aid. Almost nobody has reported it, but here is a direct quote from that exchange.

In this exchange, Sondland talks about one of the Democrat witnesses raising the rumor of quid pro quo with him. So, Sondland called the President, and here you see the President directly told him, “There is no quid pro quo. No quid pro quo.”

On top of that, we have Vice President Pence meeting with President Zelensky on September 1st, and about three weeks later, you have President Trump, here on the right, with President Zelensky!

So, Madam Speaker, in closing – let's review. We have got a total sham process, a real star chamber. Despite this sham of a process, we have no evidence that President Trump ordered any kind of quid pro quo, none. The call transcript shows no demand, President Zelensky says there was no demand, and no evidence shows President Trump ordered a demand. The Ukrainians got the aid money, within days of even finding out it was on hold, and finally Madam Speaker, they got the high-level meetings – not only with the President of the United States but also with the Vice President – that they wanted!

But here we are, Madam Speaker. So many important issues falling by the wayside, with nothing getting done for the American people. The Constitution makes clear that impeachment is an acceptable redress only for “Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors” – nothing less.

I think my friends on the other side, unfortunately, they get up here in Washington, and they forget that although they may not like this President, he was chosen by the American people as the leader of this country. And, I am sorry, Madam Speaker, they must do much better than offering the American people some hearsay and bureaucratic gossip if they want to take this President down.

The truth is this isn't about removing the President. They know that the votes in the Senate aren't there for that. This is about satisfying their resistance base and defeating President Trump in the 2020 election.

This entire process, from its very inception, has been a hypocritical, shameful exercise in partisan political opportunism. There is no substance here. None of President Trump's actions even approach anything remotely near impeachable conduct. But Democrats have made a critical error in orchestrating their scheme. They have underestimated the resolve of the American people that elected this President. The facts are on our side, and we will rise to the occasion and fight back against this radical scheme to remove President Trump.

I yield back.